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The Art of Motivation

The United States Marine Corps thrives on its ethos of honor, courage and commitment, and Staff Sgt. Charles F. Wolf epitomizes that ethos through art.

He's a stocky 5 feet, 5 inches tall, 160 pounds-from weight he gained during his years of bodybuilding. His face, chiseled like stone, doesn't look mean. Wolf, a graphics instructor at the Defense Information School here, is a very easy-going person who believes in thinking outside the box to which most people limit themselves. Through his perseverance he has managed to apply his artistic creativity to other aspects of his life.

Growing up, he never believed his interest in art would develop the following it has, he said. Like most kids, he enjoyed doodling on scratch sheets of paper as something to pass the time. His first formal graphic design education was at a vocational school the year before he graduated high school.

"I just believe that everyone doodles or draws in their free time," said Wolf. "Some of us try, and then there are people who have a natural talent for it and excel from an early age."

He joined the Marine Corps in 1987 and started his career as an anti-tank assault man, or dragon gunner. For nine years his artistic creativity remained dormant, except for small requests to draw things like range flags, random sketches, or cartoons during his off-duty time.

"Initially I saw it as an opportunity to boost morale,"

> **Staff Sgt. Charles F. Wolf**, graphics instructor, Defense Information School, shares his office space with several SEMPERTOON caricatures. Over a period of a few years, Wolf has developed his caricatures based on his experiences and those of fellow Marines.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Kevin Dolloson, Illustration by Staff Sgt. Charles F. Wolf



said the Ashtabula, Ohio, native. "And I never lost that fire for seeing something come to life in front of me — that's the essence of art."

While stationed aboard the USS *Blue Ridge* in Yokosuka, Japan, he began drawing cartoons, which would soon be referred to as *Sempertoons*. This assignment fueled Wolf with a plethora of ideas for cartoons. "It was endless, and I saw how my cartoons made people laugh," he said.

Wolf's love for art began to equate to his love for the Corps, but he thought he had to keep the two worlds separate.

"I knew that art was going to take me somewhere, I just had to figure out how to connect the two worlds," he said. "It all came together in one moment, and it was like a big tidal wave hitting me."

As an enlisted instructor at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., the instructor group tasked him with drawing a sketch of the range. His sketch was sent to the graphics department to be drawn on a larger scale, and subsequently, he was sent to graphics to ensure they



take the full 90 days they're allotted after completing the Instructor's Training Course, according to Thomas.

"The sole emphasis is to inspire the artistic talent in young Marines everywhere," said Wolf. "There's an artist in every platoon, or unit, who is not using his or her talent to its fullest potential. If I can inspire just one of them to take their talent to the next level, then it's all worth it."

His ability to inspire saved DINFOS student, Pfc. Michael Molinski, from a lack of motivation when he failed the Basic Journalism Course.

"When I failed BJC, I was very demotivated, and I didn't know what I was going to do," said the Hudson, N.Y., native. Wolf helped Molinski put a portfolio together, and get re-assigned as a graphics student.

"I've been drawing my whole life, but I didn't know this MOS existed until I got to this school," Molinski said. "When I wake up in the morning, I don't feel like I'm going to work, it's something I love doing. That's the best part about the job."

Wolf said the creation of *Sempertoons*

compact disc and hope to go public with their musical talents someday.

Another friend he artistically encouraged convinced him to try his talents at bodybuilding. He took the same motivation that he applies to *Sempertoons* and focused it on bodybuilding and placed in a few competitions. He displays his awards on a table in his home office.

In fact, his home office is full of items that reflect his accomplishments.

The walls of the office are covered in cartoons and pictures of famous people who appreciate him and all he does for the Corps. One of his cartoons was included in the Navy Times 1998 Year in Review. One of his first full page articles in a military publication is laminated and hangs next to cartoons signed by military dignitaries, encased coins - including a pair of presidential cufflinks - and a license plate that reads "SMPR2NS."

The office is very neat and organized with a computer on a desk at one side of the room and a large box of markers on a drawing table at the other side of the room.

1995, when it all started - drawing pencils with more colors than the rainbow, three pennies, a poker chip, a wrist watch without the band, and an assortment of other odds and ends.

With all that Wolf maintains as a full-time Marine and a cartoonist, it's hard to imagine how he can stay organized, but his wife explains it easily.

"I do it," said Amy, his wife of 13 years. "And I'll admit when he first said to me that he wanted to market the cartoons, I laughed at him. I didn't think anyone would be interested in drawings on paper."

But one day around Christmas 1996, they sold more calendars than Amy could have ever imagined at the time.

"I came back to the exchange and saw this crowd of people around something and I said 'it must be a sale' so I wanted to get in on it, too," she said. "When I got there, I saw it was Charles, I couldn't believe it. He was signing, selling and bagging all at once. I jumped in to help."

After that, Amy realized this was going to go further than she anticipated, so she started calling suppliers to

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were duplicating his work correctly.

"I didn't even know that graphics existed," he said. "I walked through that building completely astounded, and that's where the desire to change my (military occupational specialty) evolved."

After the seed was planted, he was sent to his new duty station in Camp Pendleton, Calif., assigned to 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, which deployed with the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade. This provided another opportunity for him to gather material for his cartoons.

Even though Wolf had done several drawings during his Marine Corps career, he still did not realize the full capability of his talent.

"To be honest, the full impact of art did not hit me until I started doing *Sempertoons*," said Wolf. "In fact, the first few drawings weren't even that great."

When he returned from deployment, he met with MOS monitors and requested a lateral move to the 4611 MOS, or graphic illustrator.

His request was eventually approved

and he reported for duty at the Quantico graphics center for three years, to include six months of on-the-job-training. He then served as the chief of graphics on Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and two-and-a-half years later he was selected to be an instructor at DINFOS.

He now has the opportunity to pass on to younger Marines his talent and knowledge as a graphics illustrator.

Yet, his graphics knowledge is not the only thing Wolf passes on to DINFOS students, and students aren't the only ones affected by his presence. Instructors and students alike are inspired by the enthusiasm he brings to everything he does.

"If I could say one word to sum up when I first met him-motivation," said Air Force Master Sgt. Brian Nickey, noncommissioned officer-in-charge of the Media Production Department. "He's like a steam train running full-speed ahead at anything he does. It could be the simplest of tasks. He's the first to volunteer for anything, and probably one of the most motivated people I've ever met in my life."

"In the short time that he has been here, he has already taken the media production team to a new level," said Nickey. "I even feel a little more motivated."

Wolf continuously pushes himself, and that has an affect on everybody, said Nickey.

The motivation Wolf gains from his cartoon also helps him stay ahead of the game and has helped him become the first instructor in about three or four years to be certified in all three functions of the media department, said John Thomas, academic director, Media Productions Department.

"He accomplished that within his first 60 days here, whereas in the past, instructors made that accomplishment within a year," said Thomas.

Thomas has been a member of the DINFOS staff since 1989 as active-duty enlisted and now as a civilian. "I've seen a lot of Marines come and go," he said. "Staff Sgt. Wolf embodies the Marine Corps ethos, and he has managed to take off running since he's been here."

Wolf obtained his teacher's certification in 30 days, when most instructors



has allowed his creativity to flourish, not only in art, but also in music and physical fitness.

He has friends because of *Sempertoons* who have inspired him to play the guitar and compete in bodybuilding. He and a friend recorded a

"I still have the pencils in a Ziploc bag like I used when I first started drawing, but I also have a huge box of pencils and this collection of markers," said Wolf. "It helps to add color to the cartoon."

The Ziploc bag is new, but it still has the same things that were in it in

avoid paying retail prices for their resources. Now, they market mouse pads, calendars, matted prints, and Wolf even sits for print and calendar signing sessions. Most recently, he completed his first book, *Welcome To The Real World, DevilDog* which is available for sale.

Wolf has taken his creativity and exposed it for the entire Marine Corps and world to see.

"As a Marine you're always trying to convey certain situations and moments to family members, and it's sometimes hard to do without a visual aid," he said. "So that's the most magical thing for me now, is that I get to bring those moments home for so many Marine families."

In an article published in "Marines" February 1996, Wolf made a statement that encapsulates his whole motivation.

"Marines spend their whole lives surrounded by stories and adventures. I key in on that fact and put them into my cartoons," said Wolf. "I think it makes Marines feel better when they have a cartoon to go with their story, or their particular adventure." M